

Former naval base home to new research learning center at Acadia National Park

By John T. Kelly



A former navy base, the research learning center facilities at Acadia National Park are in the process of being converted to bunk, classroom, lodging, and lab space for visiting researchers and educators. In 2003 the center hosted more than a dozen researchers and conducted 13 residential education camps for more than 460 fifth through seventh grade students.

The timing of the Natural Resource Challenge and creation of NPS research learning centers was especially opportune for Acadia National Park, Maine. About the time that Acadia received approval for its research learning center, the U.S. Navy was preparing to close a base located within the Schoodic Peninsula section of the park. In 2002, the navy transferred the 100-acre (40-ha) base to the National Park Service. The former base is now home to the Schoodic Education and Research Center.

Acadia National Park is overcoming the challenge of converting more than 35 buildings from military to research and education use. The park is working with partners, such as the University of Maine, to create a niche for research and education that is unmatched in the region. The goal of the Schoodic Education and Research Center is to provide research and education benefits beyond the boundaries of the park. To meet this vision the center will facilitate education and research to promote the understanding, protection, and conservation of natural and cultural resources of the National Park System. It will also advance related research at the regional, national, and international levels.

In 2003, park managers began a strategy to attract partners to the research learning center and prepared a business plan that includes a market and economic viability analysis of the site. The park is also establishing an independent nonprofit organization to assist with the center's development and operation. The nonprofit will coordinate partners and manage center activities, while the park provides facility management and security for the campus. The park will expand the operation of Schoodic Education and Research Center with demonstration projects and other program activities in 2004. ■

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Landmark year for Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units

By Jean E. McKendry and Gary E. Machlis

THE COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM STUDIES UNITS (CESUs) Network provides research, technical assistance, and education to federal resource management, environmental, and research agencies, and their partners. Each CESU is a collaboration of federal agencies, a host university, and partner institutions. Since June 1999, when the first four CESUs were established, the network has grown considerably.

By contemporary standards, the network is young and emerging. Yet, much has been accomplished between 1999 and 2003: 16 CESUs were competitively established and became operational, with the 17th (and final) CESU nearly completed (see map). Thirteen federal agencies from five departments—Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, and Energy—participate in the network. The 16 CESUs include 120 universities and colleges (25 participate in more than one CESU), and 22 of these universities and colleges are minority institutions: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Native American Tribal Colleges, and Predominantly Hispanic Serving Institutions. The other 34 CESU partners range from Audubon of Florida and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society to the Missouri Botanical Garden and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

As the number of CESUs in the network has grown, so have the number and range of projects. By December 2001 and the close of the first inventory, 500 projects were catalogued as under way or completed; that number is now well over 1,000. Network projects range from small monitoring projects to a million-dollar restoration effort, incorporating expertise from the biological, physical, social, and cultural sciences, and many fields of cultural studies and the humanities.

In June 2003 the CESU Network held its Third Biennial National Meeting in Washington, D.C. More than 150 representatives from federal agencies, universities, and other partners across the country and across the CESU Network participated. The meeting included

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profiles of CESU projects and sessions on implementing CESUs, funding opportunities, and federal agency opportunities and needs. Most importantly, the meeting provided a chance for participants from newer CESUs to learn from the more experienced CESUs.

In addition to the growth of the CESU Network, much activity is related to maturation of individual CESUs. For example, almost every CESU has added partners (33 in all). Several CESUs have begun to hold joint meetings and share functions with one another. Contracting officials from participating federal agencies and universities have gained experience and applied their skills to moving projects forward. The first

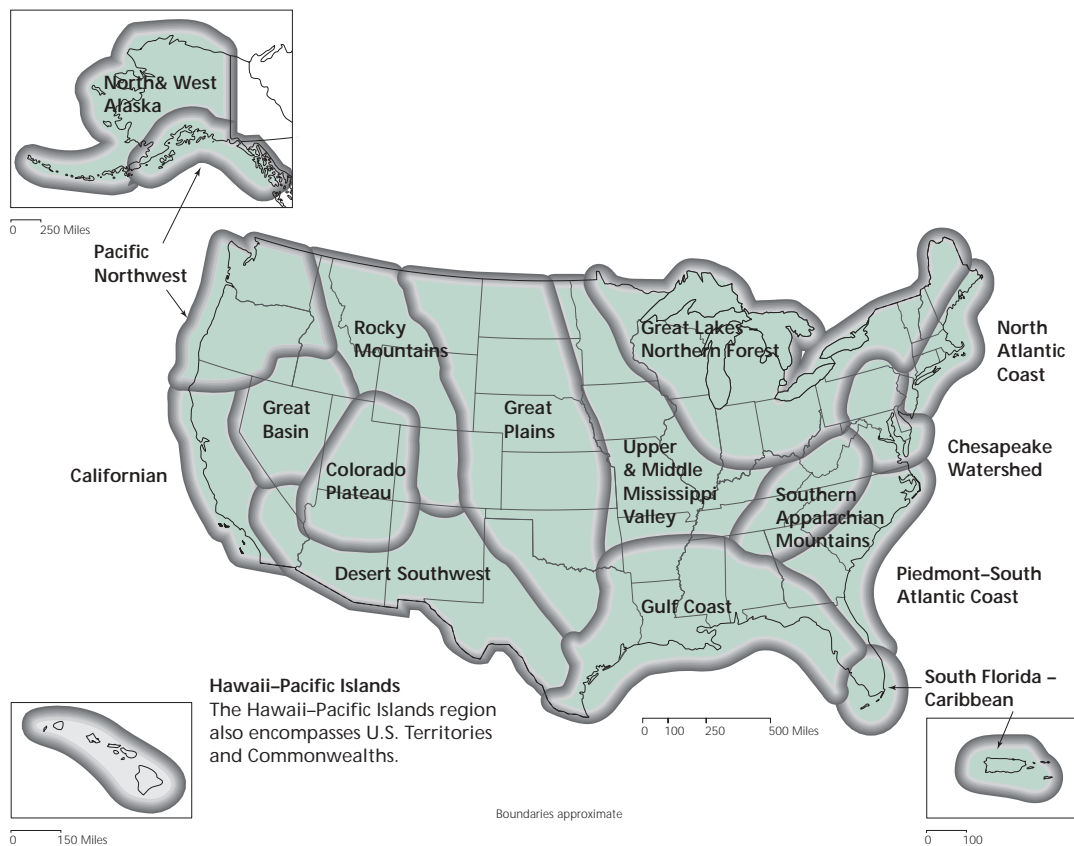
COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM STUDIES UNITS NETWORK

Sixteen Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units were in operation in 2003, with the 17th and final CESU to be initiated in 2004 in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands.

- In the CESU Network
- Being established in FY 2004

Participating Federal Agencies:

Bureau of Land Management
Bureau of Reclamation
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Geological Survey
National Park Service
Agricultural Research Service
USDA Forest Service
Natural Resources Conservation Service
National Marine Fisheries Service
Department of Defense
Department of Energy
Environmental Protection Agency
National Aeronautics and Space Administration



four CESUs will be up for renewal in 2004, and the CESU Council has established a renewal process that is both efficient and substantive, including self-assessment, independent review, minimal paperwork, and maximum confidence that CESUs operating effectively should be renewed.

A long-term strategy is also critical to the CESU Network. In spring 2003, after considerable input from federal agencies and a public comment period, the CESU Council released the CESU Network Strategic Plan for FY 2004–2008. This plan includes several important network initiatives, from advancing the information infrastructure of CESUs to encouraging multiagency, transboundary projects.

The National Park Service has been very active in the CESU Network, contributing to its growth and maturation. As part of the Natural Resource Challenge, the National Park Service placed coordinators at the host university for each of 12 CESUs, serving as “brokers”

to match park needs with university expertise and facilitate interagency collaboration. The Challenge also has provided funding for NPS projects at CESUs.

Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units provide opportunities to create sound science and scholarship, give skillful public service, and deliver usable knowledge to federal agencies and their partners grappling with the environmental challenges of the 21st century. The first four years in the development of the network are evidence that these challenges can be overcome through the CESU Network as it continues to grow and mature. ■

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